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4 December 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director (Plans)

THRU : DDE []

SUBJECT : []

1. This memorandum contains three recommendations in paragraph 14.

Situation

2. President Kennedy plans a visit to Caracas, Venezuela, and Bogota, Colombia, from 15-18 December 1961. A more detailed description of his itinerary and the composition of the Presidential party are given in Tab A.

3. Mr. Robert Woodward, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, believes that the reasons for the trip are first, the strong support that Presidents Betancourt and Lleras Camargo have given to the Alliance for Progress and second, President Betancourt's role in the last few months as a courageous leader who has supported U.S. policy toward both the Dominican Republic and Cuba, including breaking relations with the Castro government. A genuinely warm reception by both Venezuelan and Colombian officialdom and by the public at large would mark the trip as a success. Any appreciable manifestations of hostility towards the visit in either country would detract from the success of the trip.

4. The Office of Current Intelligence has prepared a "Preliminary Assessment of Security during the President's Visit to Venezuela and Colombia" which is attached as Tab B. This paper lists factors favoring the success of the visit and factors which could cause the trip to be a failure from the standpoint of the President's personal security and of the prestige of the United States. It is to be noted that the OCI study tends to deal with the security of the President to a greater extent than with the effects on United States prestige of the trip and of local reactions to it. These will be touched upon in more detail in the next section of this memorandum.

Risks

5. The prospective visits of the President to Venezuela and Colombia appear, on balance, to offer serious political risks. These arise from the

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very real dangers of Communist-inspired mass disturbances and consequent anti-American propaganda exploitation. Even if the President's personal safety can be assured, the image of mass popular antagonism toward the President of the United States would further encourage the Communists and dishearten wavering friends of the United States in Latin America and other parts of the world.

6. As the OCI paper points out, there appears to be a reasonable assurance for the security of the President in Venezuela, provided the Venezuelan National Guard is out in force. However, there remains the danger that the Communists and their sympathizers may decide to carry out disorders. Although it is likely such disorders could be controlled by the National Guard, there is no effective means of preventing them short of the most extreme civil controls. Such incidents would enable Communists to claim that the United States is so detested in Venezuela that its President is unable to visit without extreme security precautions. Furthermore, a publicized disrupted visit might create considerable adverse reactions among the other underdeveloped transitional countries in Latin America and elsewhere, despite the aim to dramatize United States dedication to the Alliance for Progress and similar aid programs.

7. It must be presumed, inasmuch as newspaper treatment on a probable visit began as early as the last week in October, that certain anti-American groups are now planning more objectionable activities to denigrate the visit. Those plans, undoubtedly, include the use of select activists (among the PCV, MIR, and other elements of the extreme left) to incite disorder and riots; the use of large well organized groups from anti-American, left-wing, high school and university students and Communist-controlled labor unions to disrupt ceremonies, meetings, and automobile tours. Further, pro-Castro supporters may be expected to depict the President as being anti-Castro, anti-Cuban, and hence anti-Latin American. Plans for continuing and more vicious anti-Yanqui media treatment must also be in the mill. In this regard, it is to be noted that an intensely adverse press contributed to the difficulties during the 1958 visit of Mr. Nixon.

8. Tabs C and D, prepared by CI/ICG, describe assets, capabilities and policies of the Communist movements in Venezuela and Colombia.

9. What the anti-American forces may be expected to seek, or even to manufacture, as a prerequisite to an effective show of force against President Kennedy, will be some sort of catalyst or trigger. They know how the Galitan assassination touched off the 1948 Bogotazo and how an article in Time brought swift and serious anti-American disorders in Bolivia in 1959. In the absence of any exploitable situation in Venezuela or Colombia, they may look elsewhere -- for example, to the Dominican Republic, where U.S. Navy warships are standing off the coast. Regardless of the historic necessity, from an American government viewpoint, of keeping the balaguer

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government from falling to a pro-Castro group, there could develop from this situation an opportunity for Communist agitators to fan the flames of anti-Americanism by portraying Balaguer as the heir to Trujillo's dictatorship and President Kennedy as the real force behind Balaguer. The Venezuelan and Colombian public reactions to the Dominican crisis will bear close watching. Should they take a strongly anti-American turn, it would be prudent to re-open the question of whether the trip should be made at all at this time (see Recommendations).

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